

Films

BY MICHAEL BONNER

This month: Kurt Cobain's life is examined, Ben Stiller gets neurotic, the Western goes Dogme95 and Blade Runner returns...

Kurt Cobain: Montage Of Heck In the closing pages of her excellent memoir, *Girl In A Band*, Kim Gordon writes about performing with the surviving members of Nirvana last April, during their induction into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. Gordon describes the performance as an "explosion of grief", inspired in part by the breakdown of her own marriage to Thurston Moore, but especially "the furious sadness" she still felt at Kurt Cobain's death, 20 years previously. Cobain – and Nirvana – continue to exert a particular pull; indeed, one of the most surprising things about Brett Morgen's documentary is that this is only the first authorised film to appear since Cobain's death in April, 1994. What's also a surprise is how good *Kurt Cobain: Montage Of Heck* actually is. Filmed with unrestricted access to Cobain's archive – audio material, diaries, home videos – this film is the whole thing.

A thread running through *Montage Of Heck* concerns families. At first, this means Cobain's own relationship with his mother (good) and father (difficult); later on, the equally tricky one that he experiences with his wife, Courtney Love, and daughter Frances Bean. Cobain was raised in Aberdeen, Washington, described as "a lovely, awesome place to raise children" by his mother, Wendy. At this point, it would have been instructive to hear more from Cobain's estranged father, Don; if only to hear his side of the story in more detail. Like all teenagers, Cobain struggled to fit in. In his teens, there is marijuana – "the ultimate form of expression" – and then punk rock. "I was completely blown away," he says in a recording. "It expressed the way I felt, socially and politically." We follow Cobain's immersion into the underground, and the friendships and alliances he forms with likeminded souls; chief among them, Krist Novoselic, who becomes Nirvana's bassist. Novoselic is one of Morgen's key interviewees: an articulate man, whose relatively low profile since Cobain's death lends a freshness to the documentary.

Novoselic is a sympathetic guide through the first hour or so of the film, as Nirvana find an excitable and hungry audience for their music. Morgen's film considers the complex, self-conscious relationship Cobain and Nirvana had with their success. The arrival of Courtney Love offers a change of perspective. Considering the way Love and Cobain's relationship became embedded in the tabloid landscape, there's inevitably something uncomfortable about watching the home footage of



them larking about, semi-clothed, in bedrooms. They are not easy company to like: infantile and, considering their status, mostly embittered, they routinely goad each other into increasing levels of snark. The footage of Cobain, bouncing Frances Bean on his knee, mumbling The Muppets' "Mahna Mahna" to his infant daughter, is sad and shocking for the unflinching way it depicts the debilitating influence of heroin on Cobain. His face is covered in scabs, his eyes barely focusing. The film ends with Nirvana's performance of "Where Did You Sleep Last Night" on MTV's *Unplugged*. "I'll shiver the whole night through," Cobain sang, in doing so transforming this traditional American folk song into a haunting piece about addiction.

► While We're Young The writer and director Noah Baumbach's collaboration with Ben Stiller, which began with 2010's *Greenberg*, continues with *While We're Young*. In *Greenberg*, Stiller played a prickly fortysomething who starts an affair with a younger woman; here he plays another fortysomething who is similarly smitten by a youthful protagonist. Both films are preoccupied with the pull of youth and the challenges of ageing; but while *Greenberg* was quite a sad comedy about missed opportunities and personal failure, *While We're Young* is often played for broader laughs: it's less Woody Allen and more Judd Apatow, perhaps.

Stiller and Naomi Watts play documentary filmmakers whose marriage is significantly altered by a new friendship with a twentysomething couple (Adam Driver and Amanda Seyfried). Josh (Stiller), who has spent eight years working on a sprawling, unfocused film project, is flattered by the attention of Jamie (Driver), who presents himself as a fan of Josh's early work. Jamie and his wife, Darby (Seyfried), are loft-dwelling hipsters whose retro embrace of vinyl, board games, typewriters and a VHS collection is wittily contrasted with the older couple's reliance on current technology. One of the best scenes in *Greenberg* found Stiller's character attending a house party with a much younger demographic. "You're so sincere and interested in things," he cooed, while championing Duran Duran's "The Chauffeur" as the perfect cocaine song. This difficult, often cringeworthy courtship between the generations is very much the crux of *While We're Young*. Incidentally, Stiller, Watts and Driver are all terrific; though unusually for such a strong writer of female characters, Baumbach slightly undersells Seyfried's critical role. The dynamic between Stiller and Watts, especially, is solid: he is tightly wound and neurotic, while she is much looser. It's Watts' best work for a while. Props, too, to Beastie Boy Adam Horovitz, who plays one half of Stiller and Watts' baby-obsessed best friends.

Reviewed this month...



KURT COBAIN: MONTAGE OF HECK

Director
Brett Morgen
Starring
Kurt Cobain,
Courtney Love
Opens April 10
Cert 15
8/10



WHILE WE'RE YOUNG

Director Noah
Baumbach
Starring
Ben Stiller,
Naomi Watts
Opens April 3
Cert 15
9/10



THE FALLING

Director
Carol Morley
Starring Maisie
Williams,
Florence Pugh
Opens April 24
Cert 15
7/10



THE SALVATION

Director Kristian
Levrang
Starring
Mads Mikkelsen,
Eva Green
Opens April 15
Cert 15
6/10



BLADE RUNNER: THE FINAL CUT

Director
Ridley Scott
Starring Harrison
Ford, Sean Young
Opens April 3
Cert 15
9/10